

The Panther-Skin Saddlecloth of the Horse and Groom Relief in Athens:

Macedonian Influence in Attic Art

The Horse and Groom Relief, found in a rescue excavation in Athens in 1948, was examined closely in the publication by W. H. Schuchhardt in *Antike Plastik* (1978). Since then, the preeminent scholars of sculpture of the Hellenistic period have largely agreed upon its use—that it was a funerary monument, probably to a soldier—but have debated its reconstruction, the original date of its creation, and the origin of the person for whom it was erected (Athenian, Macedonian, or otherwise). This last problem—the origin of the deceased—can be answered by analyzing the iconographic clues. While the monument itself is Athenian in that it was found in Athens, the panther-skin saddlecloth—one of the most prominent features of the monument—is not found in Attic art of any kind outside of mythological or Dionysian contexts.

Instead, the use of a feline animal pelt seems to be a Macedonian convention, as in the wall painting from the “Kinch tomb” at Vergina which depicts a Macedonian on horseback attacking an Easterner (Miller, 1993). The saddlecloth made from the pelt of a large predator appears to be connected to the Macedonian traditional hunting expeditions depicted in wall paintings and mosaics from Vergina (Andronicus, 1988) and Pella (Petsas, 1978). In a culture that required the completion of a successful boar hunt in order to recline at symposia rather than sit with the women (Athenaeus 1.18a), a pelt of an animal that could also inflict a mortal wound like that of a large cat would serve as a trophy worthy of display on one’s horse. This analysis of this relief’s iconography attempts to shed some light on a monument that is exceptional in its execution but poorly understood vis-à-vis its original function.

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